

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SCRUTINY & PETITIONS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the SCRUTINY &
PETITIONS COMMITTEE held via Microsoft
Teams on Thursday, 7 December 2023 at
10.30 am

- Present:- Councillor E. Thornton-Nicol (Chair), J. Anderson, J. Cox, M. Douglas, J. PatonDay, N. Richards, E. Robson and F. Sinclair
- Apologies:- Councillor S. Scott
- In Attendance:- Director Infrastructure & Environment, G. Lennox, D. Bogdanovic, J. Higgins, G. Knox, and Democratic Services Officer (L. Cuerden)

1. **ORDER OF BUSINESS.**

The Chair varied the order of business as shown on the agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

2. **MINUTE**

Copies of the Minute of Meeting held on 19 October 2023 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minute for signature by the Chair.

3. **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING GRANTS AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

- 3.1 There had been circulated copies of a report from the Head of Adult Social Care Gwyneth Lennox which outlined the origins and processes around the Scheme of Assistance (SoA), introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 to provide support with repairing, improving or adapting a home. The Act separated disabled people's applications for assistance from those with repairs and included a general duty to provide assistance in making a house suitable for a disabled person. The SoA provided information and advice to help private homeowners and private tenants to keep their homes in good condition and suitable to meet their needs. The Scheme was operated by SBC in conjunction with Community Care and the Health and Social Care Joint Integration Board, to which major adaptations had been delegated. Mr Knox gave a presentation to inform Members of the processes associated with major adaptations of clients' homes. A single shared assessment process was followed to ensure a coordinated approach and to maximise services available to clients. An assessment of need was conducted and recommendations made for adaptations, additional equipment or support and indicated the urgency of the recommendations. A grant was available to fund adaptations for which homeowners, tenants and part owners were eligible. A grant was awarded if an adaptation was essential to a disabled person and covered 80-100% of the approved expense. SBC had commissioned a Care & Repair Service through Eildon Housing Association with the aim to assist older and disabled residents in the private sector in the repair, improvement or adaptation of their homes in accordance with Scottish National Care and Repair standards. A table of performance data 2017-2023 was shared with Members that detailed the number of major adaptations (social and private) and handyperson jobs carried out. The spend for the same period totalled £2.334m for major adaptations by RSLs (social), and £1.257m under the Scheme of Assistance (private). A

summary of next steps and future reviews was provided and included the streamlining of pathways for provision of equipment and adaptations; effective adoption of new models of health and social care; effective interface with relevant partners and an ongoing review and monitoring of the LHS.

- 3.2 In response to a question about the role of the Health & Social Care IJB, it was confirmed that while the IJB carried out the assessment of need, SBC maintained oversight of the work and delivered the wider assessments by Occupational Therapy and subsequent adaptive work under the Scheme of Assistance. In response to a question about the funding of RSLs, it was confirmed that their funding came directly from Scottish Government. Funding sources for adaptations to households was dependant on who owned the property. The issue of adaptations to shared access to communal areas was raised; permission from other occupants was necessary with legislation to prevent them from refusing permission unreasonably. In relation to the handyman provision delivered through the Care & Repair service, it was confirmed that any profits were to be directed back into the service with the estimate that any income generated from its provision was not sufficient to meet the cost of doing so. Mr Knox agreed to obtain these figures for Members and distribute via email. The importance of Occupational Therapists (OT) communicating effectively with clients was highlighted to avoid incorrect or non-use of equipment. Also highlighted was the impact on other household members/carers in coping with their situation and the role of OTs in recognising and supporting where necessary. The holistic approach of OTs was discussed along with the framework for identifying additional training needs. The importance of open communication between OTs, managers and clients was also highlighted. Ms Lennox reported that the service was keen to promote a self-evaluation process across adult social work and occupational therapy services during 2024. There was also to be a review of allied health professionals starting in Spring 2024. Furthermore, a report was to be brought to the Health & Social Care IJB in 2024 following a review of the approach to adaptations in response to the latest Scottish Government guidance.
- 3.3 The Chair thanked the team for today's presentation and the wider work of the department in their delivery of services and response to referrals.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation and AGREED that Mr Knox obtain figures on income and costs associated with the handyman service for Members and distribute via email.

4. PUBLIC TOILET PROVISION IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

- 4.1 There had been circulated copies of a presentation by John Curry, Director Infrastructure & Environment, the purpose of which was to inform Members of the assessment of public toilet provision in the Scottish Borders, and results from the consultation exercise. There were currently 27 public toilets open for use and 14 which had remained closed following the pandemic and were not to reopen. A summary of key principles was provided and included: a need to enhance the condition of the operational facilities for which surveys and capital investment was required; a phased approach to upgrading payment operated locking facilities and contactless payment facilities; maintained access for RADAR users; an appropriate cleaning and inspection regime; and SBC to maintain the operational estate and provide one facility per each major existing settlement. The results of a mapping exercise was shared with Members which showed those facilities open, closed, disabled provision and areas where provision was needed. Stow was highlighted as lacking provision. A summary table of facility condition and suitability was provided with grading as follows: A (good); B (satisfactory); C (poor) and D (bad). A condition survey in November 2023 of all SBC facilities resulted in 3 graded as A, 22 graded as B and 1 graded as C.
- 4.2 On the matter of payment operating locking facilities, SBC charged for access to 17 of the 27 sites. Any income generated was offset by the increasing burden of repairs and operating

costs and several considerations were highlighted: frequent breakdown of coin collection units; delayed opening times; expensive repairs to locking mechanism and to doors vandalised to gain entry (6 this year to date at £2k per call out); and multiple instances of locks failing while toilet was occupied. There had been a trial of removing charges from six sites in Melrose, Coldingham, Kelso (Shedden Park & Horsemarket), Innerleithen and Duns. There had been no direct increase in vandalism levels or complaints. Two options were presented to Members: Option 1 – to invest in estate wide contactless collection; and Option 2 – to remove charging from most facilities. It was highlighted that 50% of the revenue from toilets was spent on collecting that income. Once the trial had concluded, its findings were to be brought back to Council in May 2024. In terms of identifying opportunities, gaps and key priorities for the service, SBC officers were developing in-house mapping and were to engage in early 2024 with Community Planning Partners, Live Borders and Third and private sector partners. Officers had also worked with community groups interested in community-led operations and a summary of these was shared with Members. A further framework model – the Comfort Scheme – was being explored by which a grant was to be awarded to meet operational costs incurred by an organisation or company interested in participation. Highland Council already had a comprehensive Comfort Scheme in place. A summary of cleaning standards, presentation and complaints (of which there were 3 in 2023) was provided. Regarding disposals, the lease on St Mary's Loch facilities was in the process of termination, a community asset transfer process had begun on School Brae, Peebles and several other enquiries had been received for facilities in Galashiels and Hawick.

- 4.3 There followed a discussion on matters arising from the presentation. With regards to provision in Burnmouth, a containerised solution was under consideration, at a cost of around £35k for two toilets, for which there was no provision in the current capital and revenue allocations. Alternative funding sources were to be investigated. Regarding the lack of provision in Stow, a comfort scheme was the preferred route with enquiries to begin in early 2024 along with the use of the football pavilion and the railway station. There was acknowledgement that consistency was required with regards to the opening of disabled facilities that had been earmarked for closure. There was a suggestion that signage be installed in toilets with an SBC contact number in the event of a person being locked in, with the caveat that someone would be available to answer the call. Incorrect signage in Newtown St Boswells was highlighted, along with a request that members of the public be redirected to HQ toilet facilities.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny & Petitions Committee was due to be held on 21 March 2024 at 10 am.

The meeting concluded at 12:00pm